

Claims

1. A networked computer broadcasting system with provision for delivering broadcasts and also advertisements or other messages to individual users, said system comprising:

a tuner software system designed to be installed within the computers of users who wish to receive broadcasts over the network and including a broadcast reception component that can receive a broadcast from the network and present it to the user;

a user demographic information gathering component of the tuner software system that can ask the user to provide demographic information and that can store this information locally under such control that it cannot readily be gathered centrally and combined with user identification information in such a manner as to raise individual privacy concerns;

advertisements or other messages at least some of which are associated with demographic information; and

a message presentation system associated with the tuner software system, that can selectively present advertisements or other messages to the user, comparing the demographic information provided by each user with that associated with at least some of the advertisements or other messages and then presenting to the user those advertisements or other messages having demographic information most closely matched to the demographic information provided by each user.

2. A networked computer broadcasting system in accordance with claim 1 in which the message presentation system includes

a multimedia advertisement or other message server containing advertisements or other messages at least some of which are associated with demographics;

an advertisement or message request component of said tuner software system that requests an advertisement or other message from said multimedia advertisement or other message server and that transmits to said server, along with request, the user demographic information not including any user identity information;

the multimedia advertisement or other message server, in response to such a request, normally returns the requested advertisement or other message; and

if the requested advertisement or other message corresponds to a set of advertisements or other messages associated with demographic information, the multimedia advertisement or other message server performs the message presentation system comparison and then returns the advertisement or other message most closely matched to the demographic information provided by each user.

3. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 2 wherein the gathered demographic information comprises the user's gender, age, and geographic location.

4. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 3 wherein the geographic location is specified as a zip code.

5. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 4 wherein the multimedia advertisement or other message server is able to transform zip code information into region of the country information.

6. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 1 which includes a broadcasting system that broadcasts over the network to computers containing the tuner software system which have been enabled by their users to receive a broadcast;

and which also includes a network signaling mechanism that signals over the network to computers containing the tuner software system and receiving a broadcast, the signals informing such computers of when advertisements or other information will appear within a broadcast and also the identity of such advertisements and other information.

7. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 6 wherein the broadcasting system receives commands from a producer system to have messages presented to the users and receives commands from broadcast signals to have advertisements presented to the users, and wherein at least some of these commands cause the network signaling mechanism to signal the tuner software systems accordingly to make these presentations.

8. A networked computer broadcasting system in accordance with claim 6 in which the message presentation system includes

a multimedia advertisement or other message server containing advertisements or other messages at least some of which are associated with demographics;

an advertisement or message request component of said tuner software system that requests an advertisement or other message from said multimedia advertisement or other message server and that transmits to said server, along with request, the user demographic information not including any user identity information;

the multimedia advertisement or other message server, in response to such a request, normally returns the requested advertisement or other message; and

if the requested advertisement or other message corresponds to a set of advertisements or other messages associated with demographic information, the multimedia advertisement or other message server performs the message presentation system comparison and then returns the advertisement or other message most closely matched to the demographic information provided by each user.

9. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 8 wherein the gathered demographic information comprises the user's gender, age, and geographic location.

10. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 9 wherein the geographic location is specified as a zip code.

11. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 10 wherein the multimedia advertisement or other message server is able to transform zip code information into region of the country information.

12. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 6 wherein the broadcasting system includes an advertisement or other message insertion system that can replace portions of the broadcast, or insert into the broadcast, advertisements or other messages.

13. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 12 wherein the broadcasting system receives commands from a producer system to have the tuner software systems present messages to the users and receives commands from broadcast signals to have the tuner software systems present advertisements to the users, and wherein at least some of these commands cause the network signaling mechanism to signal the tuner software systems accordingly, while other of these commands cause the broadcasting

system's advertisement or other message insertion system to replace portions of the broadcast, or insert into the broadcast, advertisements or other messages.

14. A networked computer broadcasting system in accordance with claim 12 in which the message presentation system includes

a multimedia advertisement or other message server containing advertisements or other messages at least some of which are associated with demographics;

an advertisement or message request component of said tuner software system that requests an advertisement or other message from said multimedia advertisement or other message server and that transmits to said server, along with request, the user demographic information not including any user identity information;

the multimedia advertisement or other message server, in response to such a request, normally returns the requested advertisement or other message; and

if the requested advertisement or other message corresponds to a set of advertisements or other messages associated with demographic information, the multimedia advertisement or other message server performs the message presentation system comparison and then returns the advertisement or other message most closely matched to the demographic information provided by each user.

15. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 14 wherein the gathered demographic information comprises the user's gender, age, and geographic location.

16. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 15 wherein the geographic location is specified as a zip code.

17. A networked broadcasting system in accordance with claim 16 wherein the multimedia advertisement or other message server is able to transform zip code information into region of the country information.